2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

owns no land or other property in common and its inhabitants are rarely called upon or choose to work for a common end. At the same time, villagers are conscious of belonging to a distinct social entity which is distinguished from other villages by a collective nickname and a common sub-culture.

Many villages have a dialect quite distinct from that of their neighbours, which the inhabitants, even those who have learned to speak 'correctly' (*bil-pulit*), normally use to each other; although they will invariably address strangers in their school Maltese. There are also a number of minor variations of certain customs between villages or districts. These may include the way church bells are rung to announce a death or the way some aspects of the festas are organized. Finally, each village has its own very private body of gossip, stories, scandals and jokes, which makes up a part of its history and tradition that is not shared with outsiders.

As a congregation and a religious corporation, the village *qua* parish owns land and other property, including the parish church. It also has an appointed leader in the parish priest. The inhabitants of the village meet regularly for worship, to take part in religious processions and to carry out other devotional activities. Furthermore, they act together to celebrate the annual festa of the patron saint, who symbolizes the unity of the secular and religious aspects of the village, for he is patron of both village and parish.

A village can also be regarded as a moral community. That is, people who live there must conform to a certain code of conduct. While the community cannot enforce this code with the type of formal sanctions the police and the Church use to punish infractions of secular and religious laws, public opinion can, and does, exert great pressure for conformity. A person who flouts the canons of convention becomes the object of malicious gossip and, depending on the nature of the offence, he may also become the target of overt hostile action and have his house front splashed with paint, or his front door burned. The only way to escape from the sanctions of public opinion is to move to one of the urban areas or the expanding new suburbs, where licence can be relatively anonymous.

Members of a village thus share a common body of custom and tradition; they also display an intense loyalty to their place of birth. This sense of loyalty is strongest during the annual festa of

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

letters. His high standing in the village, and his contacts with people of influence and power outside it, led people to turn to him for advice. He was asked to represent them in their relations with the outside world. In this capacity he served his parishioners as lawyer, banker and business adviser. He was also the traditional dispenser of charity.

The increasing literacy of the people and their ever-widening range of contacts outside the limits of the parish has somewhat reduced their dependence upon the parish priest. The State's recent involvement in welfare and charity has further weakened it. But if this dependence has been reduced, it has most certainly not been eliminated. Many still call on him to divide inheritances, to argue their claims against the government or to plead with prospective employers, and not a few expect him to be able to secure better roads, new schools, sewerage and playgrounds.

Thus the parish priest is the village's chief spokesman, and many still refer to him as *il-principal tar-rahal*, 'the head of the village'. The government has long recognized this, and makes use of him as a convenient contact with the people. Each Sunday morning, in addition to his own official announcements, the parish priest reads from the altar government notices advising the people of forthcoming elections, immunization campaigns, agricultural extension lectures and so on.

But if the parish priest performs numerous services for his parishioners, both individually and collectively, he has also the power to refuse them. The sanctions with which he can punish disobedience are considerable. They range from declining to write a good conduct certificate to denying absolution in confession. On the other hand, he has the power to give rewards for services rendered. Aside from doing favours for people who have helped him, he can appoint them to offices which confer prestige and authority and, in some cases, are also financially rewarding. All this serves to underline and reinforce his position as a leader in the community.

Parish priests are usually outsiders, but the rest of the village clergy are natives of the communities in which they live. Unlike Catholic priests in Britain or the United States, who live in presbyteries, the diocesan clergy of Malta and Gozo live at home with their relatives. This means that they remain in constant contact with the village. They are often called on to take part in family

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

[p. 55]

CHAPTER V

The Church and Village Politics

Most Maltese regulate their lives by the daily and monthly cycle of religious activities. The major divisions of the day are rung from the bells of the village church. They first ring the Paternoster half an hour before the first Mass. Then the Angelus bell rings a call to prayer at eight in the morning, at noon and at sunset. The final bell of the day is rung two or three hours after sunset, and is a brief request for the living to remember the dead in their prayers. The call of the Angelus is observed by many. When it is rung, work and conversation stop whether in a government office or a village café, men remove their hats, and someone among them leads them in a short prayer. In Gozo I have seen a busy square become suddenly silent and many people kneel in the street as the Ave Maria was rung at sunset. People also often kneel in the streets when the bells announce the elevation of the Host during a sung Mass, and during Benediction in the evening. And finally, late in the evening, clusters of relatives and neighbours can be seen sitting in their open doorways reciting the Rosary together before they go to bed.

Most girls and women and many boys and men attend one of the three or four daily Masses which are offered in all parish churches between four and seven in the morning. Virtually every one in the village attends one of the five or six Masses offered on Sundays. The few who do not attend are known to the village, and are the subject of gossip and other social pressure. Since the recent dispute between the MLP and the Church, however, their numbers are increasing.

As the church bells mark the important hours of the day, so the principal divisions of the year are set out by the annual national and parochial religious feasts and processions. Besides being major religious occasions, they are eagerly looked forward to as recreational events. Though secular spectacles, such as political rallies, the government-run Carnival procession and, above all, the

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

III

A previous chapter set out the hierarchical organization of the Church. It was observed that rank was determined by seniority in combination with certain marks of honour conferred by ecclesiastical authorities in recognition of merit. Besides rank, these honours often bestow the right to certain external signs, which are much prized. The many religious processions and ceremonies provide occasions on which parishes can display their symbols of rank to outsiders. For example, the Canons of a Collegiate church wear distinctive ceremonial robes, and are permitted to carry a huge silver mace in processions as a sign of their church's rank. They add a great deal of colour and pageantry to the religious processions in which they are invited to participate. An old man once described Collegiate churches to me as 'the ornament of all other parish churches', and added, 'where there are no Canons, there is nothing in a procession.' The clergy of a church which has received the title of Basilica may carry in procession a huge red and gold damask umbrella. They are also permitted to carry a bell, to wear gold buckles on their shoes and, on certain occasions, to say Mass facing the congregation. As with the title Collegiate, the title Basilica can only be bestowed upon a church by Papal sanction. In Malta it has been given only to the Collegiate churches of Senglea and Birkirkara, to the churches of Mt. Carmel and St. Dominic in Valletta, and in Gozo to that of St. George in Rabat.

The bestowal of honours is not in fact determined by merit alone. In view of their importance as symbols of excellence, they become counters in the competition between parishes and between parish associations. Their acquisition is thus a matter of great concern to the entire community, and often becomes the subject of political action. That is, persons and groups try to influence those who make the decisions in relation to their bestowal. Through their network of personal relations, leading village figures, including the priests, try to influence the Bishop and the monsignori who surround him. They also bargain with these authorities, and if an unfavourable decision is handed down, they may resort to an open show of disrespect towards the Bishop – by smashing his coat of arms, for example – to signal their dissatisfaction and so attempt to force him to reconsider their

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

79 626 628 664

claim. The final decision is thus made in response to a great many pressures. The honour usually goes to the contender who can present the best case and apply the strongest pressure. This is normally the largest and most influential of the groups competing for the honour. Thus the number and degree of honours bestowed on any group are roughly equal to its social importance to the community of which it forms part.

The current dispute in Gozo over the bestowal of the title of Basilica on the church of St. George provides an excellent illustration of the length to which the pursuit of such honours may be carried. For many years the Collegiate Chapters of Nadur and Xaghra unsuccessfully sought to obtain this title for their respective churches. During that time the Bishop had been able to avoid having to commit himself. In Nadur many believed that their church would be the next in Gozo to become a Basilica as a compensation for certain privileges which were modified some thirty years ago. The people of Xaghra, for their part, were also under the impression that their church would become the first Basilica in Gozo.

The claims of Nadur and Xaghra were not the only ones. There was also that of the new parish which the Bishop had created around the church of St. George in Rabat. Many argued that this new parish should take the lowest position in the diocesan table of precedence. But the new parish was located in the island's capital, and many of Gozo's most influential citizens had been instrumental in bringing about its creation. Moreover, the church of St. George was one of the oldest in the diocese. In brief, the thought of their parish having an inferior rank to that of the small rural parish of Munxar, hitherto the lowest-ranking parish, was distasteful to the townsmen. As a Basilica the church of St. George could take precedence over all other parishes and occupy a place immediately before the Collegiate Chapters. The partisans of St. George were in an excellent position to make their voices heard in the Curia, and late in 1958 the title was formally bestowed upon their church. The people of Nadur and Xaghra, led by their disappointed Canons, reacted with great vigour. The abuse and violent action that resulted were as insulting to the Bishop as anything that the Labour Party has been accused of directing at him or at the Archbishop of Malta.

Nadur and Xaghra all but severed relations with the Curia.

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

Both boycotted the annual festa of St. George, and in 1961 some hot-heads in Xaghra even erected a road block to prevent cars from the village going to Rabat. The people of Nadur refused to celebrate their own festa, or to take part in the St. Gregory procession. They also refused to allow the Bishop to administer the sacrament of Confirmation in their parish. In Xaghra someone exploded a bomb on the roof of the Archpriest's house because many considered that he, an outsider, had not worked hard enough to secure the Basilica. In 1960 Xaghra celebrated only the internal festa, and even that was not without incident. Shortly before the festa, the Bishop received an anonymous letter accusing him of being an enemy of the village. Later, when he visited the village to assist at the High Mass, he was given a hostile reception. Then it was discovered that part of the throne that he was to sit on during the service was missing. Furious at these insults, he issued formal interdicts against the person or persons unknown who had written the anonymous letter and 'stolen' his throne.

To date the dispute has not been settled. The people of Nadur and Xaghra both say that peace cannot be restored until they receive some other honour to compensate them for the lost Basilica. To back up their claims, they have each spent tens of thousands of pounds during the past few years decorating their respective churches. In Nadur the new marble pulpit cost almost £5,000, and the work of covering the walls with marble may cost as much as £20,000 before it is completed.

This type of dispute, however, is not limited to Malta's sister island. The Collegiate Chapters of Birkirkara, Senglea and St. Paul's Shipwreck in Valletta have similar unresolved conflicts over precedence, and they refuse to take part in processions together. But not all their disputes are limited to matters of precedence. In 1949 the people of Birkirkara smashed the Archbishop's coat of arms and heaped rubble in the main door of their church, thereby symbolically denying him entrance. They were protesting because the Archbishop had abolished, among others, the right of the Chapter to choose as Canons only those priests born and baptized in Birkirkara. The Holy See was able to resolve the dispute, and a few years later it bestowed the title of Basilica on the town's church.

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

residence pattern is certainly true in Farrug, and I observed much the same thing in other villages divided by festa partiti. In Farrug, 65 per cent of the people living on the main square and the four streets leading into it supported St. Martin, but only 46 per cent of those living in other parts of the village did so.

Disputes between partiti usually concern matters of precedence or their ability to display devotion to their saints. Each partit has certain rights, usually secured at the cost of clashes with its rival. These include the position and participation of the club and confraternity in Church processions and at other functions, the routes over which these processions travel and the possession of certain property and its display in the parish church. Any attempt to extend or reduce them is resisted by the partit affected, which takes action to protect its interests by trying to influence the Church authorities, who must make the final decisions.

The structural position of a partit determines the kind of pressure that it can bring to bear upon the Church. Those of titular saints are, in a sense, the establishment parties. As we have seen, the Church seeks to build up their celebrations at the expense of the secondary ones. Hence a titular partit can negotiate from a strong position: its ultimate sanction is refusal to participate in the feast of the village patron, an event which the Church is anxious to see celebrated with great pomp. Secondary partiti, on the other hand, are inherently opposed to the Church in matters of festa policy. They try to increase the scale of their feasts, while the Church tries to reduce them. They dare not cancel their feasts for fear that the Church would accuse them of making trouble and suppress them, as it did the secondary festas of Our Lady of Lourdes in Qrendi, and St. Michael in Żabbar.

Their position in opposition to Church policy has given most secondary partiti a certain *esprit de corps* and unity of purpose that their rivals often lack. This has made them better able to withstand the divisive effects of the political factions which have recently weakened many of their rivals. It has also generally resulted in the emergence of stronger leaders. Secondary partiti are often united around a single professional class leader who can not only hold the partit together in the face of the attacks of its opponents, but can also argue intricate points of Canon Law with the monsignori at the Curia and, at times, with the Archbishop himself. As we have observed, the secondary partiti generally have

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

fewer professional class members. Consequently competition for the role of leader does not occur so often, and there is a longer tenure of office. In the partit of a titular saint, with its better-educated members, there are more men with the necessary qualities of leadership, and accordingly more competition for office and a high turnover of office holders. The competition both creates and results from internal factions which weaken the group. In Farrug, for example, the President of the St. Roque Band Club has led the St. Roque partit more or less continuously since Dun Rokku died thirty years ago. He is also just about the only member of the partit with the educational qualifications and social position required of a leader. The key positions of the St. Martin Band Club, in contrast, constantly pass between about half a dozen educated persons. This divided leadership has weakened the club; and on one occasion it even split in two. The strong leadership and internal unity of the secondary partiti, plus the fact that they rarely present claims that are not well founded, has enabled them to score many successes in spite of their apparently unfavourable position in relation to the Church.

Disputes between festa partiti are all very much alike. A typical dispute begins when leaders of a secondary partit petition the parish priest for some new privilege, for example the right to renew the bouquets of artificial flowers which adorn the statue of their saint. The parish priest normally refuses at first, and tells them that he thinks the old flowers are quite serviceable. His policy is to let sleeping dogs lie. Moreover, he has to take into account the rule that decorations for secondary feasts must not be more beautiful than those for titular ones. But the saint's supporters continue to bring influence to bear on him. In the meantime, members of the titular partit have learned of their rivals' move and rush to the parish priest to point out that the old flowers are more than adequate. They threaten to cancel their feast if he gives in on this matter. The priest is now caught in a vice, and the pressure on him builds up. Finally, he agrees to refer the whole case to the Curia and passes the matter upwards, usually with a feeling of relief. Relations between him and the partiti return to normal, as the scene of the struggle shifts to the Curia.

The Curia normally appoints experts to re-investigate the merits of the case, including the proposed design of the flowers. Leaders from both partiti spend a great deal of their time at the

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

578 Curia trying to persuade all concerned, from the Bishop down, to
621 think the way they do. This may go on for years, for the Curia,
793 knowing the trouble that lies ahead, is usually in no hurry to give
794 its decision. When the final decision is handed down, it is usually favourable, and the design for a set of flowers less beautiful and costly than the corresponding set of the titular partit is furnished. The secondary partit then instructs the craftsmen to begin work. The titular partit announces to everyone that it will cancel its next feast.

It often happens, however, that just before the new bouquets (or whatever *objets d'art* are concerned) are inaugurated during the secondary festa, the parish priest discovers that most of the Curia's specifications have been ignored. The new flowers are far more beautiful than they were supposed to be. He is furious. The guilty leaders of the secondary partit apologize profusely and take immediate steps to make them less beautiful. Occasionally, the priest may discipline the partit by temporarily reducing the scale of its feast. The secondary partit then holds its feast, and the flowers are admired by all visitors. Strong police reinforcements usually prevent trouble from occurring. Relations between the parish priest and the titular partit are gradually re-established and it agrees, usually for some concessions on his part, to celebrate its feast again. But in a year or so, a new dispute occurs, and the process starts all over again.

578 Sometimes relations between a parish priest and a partit reach
621 a deadlock that can be broken only by an outside peacemaker,
625 frequently an officer of the police. The police in any case have a
793 vital interest in the degree of rivalry existing in the villages, as it is
794 their business to keep order during the feast. The number of police on duty at these times ranges from a dozen or so in villages such as Siġġiewi and Naxxar, where there are no partiti, to around 100 in those where there are strong ones, such as Mqabba and Żurrieq. Occasionally a parish priest is threatened, frightened by a home-made bomb, or attacked; he then often requests, and generally receives, a transfer to another parish.

543 So far only the more important encounters between partiti have
575 been discussed. There are many other events to keep their rivalry
578 alive throughout the year. The numerous fund-raising fairs of
621 the band clubs are occasions for the village to divide along festa partit lines. While supporters of the partit running the fair flock

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

to it, their rivals invariably stage their own fair or, and this is more usual, hire several buses and noisily leave the village for a picnic or a pilgrimage to some shrine of their saint. Many other incidents divide groups and associations along partit lines. For example, a former head teacher of the Farrug school told me that he had once tried to get the girls to wear the dark blue hair ribbons which are supposed to be part of their school uniforms. He was astounded when half the girls flatly refused. It was then explained to him that blue is the colour of the St. Roque partit, so the St. Martin girls could not be expected to wear it.

Let us now look at some of the major skirmishes which have taken place in Farrug during the last ten years. During 1952 and 1953 there was a dispute over an attempt by the St. Roque procession to pass along a street over which St. Martin's followers claimed exclusive rights. When the inexperienced new parish priest backed the St. Roque claim before the Archbishop, he brought violently into the open a dispute over which his predecessor had successfully procrastinated for years. The followers of St. Martin not only refused to celebrate their feast, but also succeeded in frightening the unfortunate priest rather badly by exploding a huge rocket in the drainpipe under his house. Some St. Martin partisans gleefully recounted to me that the priest was soon transferred to another parish, and that during his last week in Farrug he had asked the police to escort him between his house and the church. Relations between the Church and the St. Martin partit were restored when the Archbishop modified the St. Roque procession route.

In 1956 the St. Martin Band Club refused to celebrate the titular festa because the Archbishop had given the Confraternity of St. Roque permission to renew the four bunches of artificial flowers which decorate the main altar during his feast. The following year the St. Roque Band Club refused to play at the installation ceremony of the new parish priest because the Curia had just turned down the confraternity's request for permission to hang a new picture over its altar. In 1960 the same priest angered the St. Roque partit by refusing to let it participate in the St. Martin centenary celebrations. The poor man's hands were tied, for the St. Martin club had declared that it would have nothing to do with the feast if its rival took any part in it. At the moment, there is another struggle in the offing. The Confraternity of St. Roque

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

208 578 665 795 walls and shouted at public meetings. Mintoff is portrayed as a Socialist devil working to give the islands over to Communism in the manner of Cuba's Castro. These are some typical examples of the ones that appeared on the blackboard outside the Kortin Catholic Action centre: 'Mintoff is the enemy of the Church', 'Nobody can serve both God and the Devil', '"The Bishops are interfering in politics!" That is what Communists say,' and 'We don't want Communists among us!' In stating their case, Mintoff and his supporters did not mince words either, as the following slogans that appeared on the blackboard of the Kortin Labour Party club demonstrate: 'We want a chance in court about the $60,000 lie',[1] 'With the Papal flag in their hands and shouting for vengeance', 'A fish begins to stink from its head',[2] and 'In Gozo they told the women that we have tails.'

208 578 665 794 795 The popular slogan 'Either with the Bishop or against the Church!' sums up the uncompromising attitude of the Church. Most of the sanctions it has imposed have presented that choice to the people in unequivocal terms. Early in May 1961, shortly after the Labour leaders were interdicted, all Church lay societies were instructed to obtain from each member a pledge of his full and unqualified support for the Archbishop. Those that declined to give this were expelled from the society concerned and their names reported to the national office of Catholic Action. But a more drastic sanction was imposed a few weeks later. After the [783] Executive of the Labour Party had invited the Archbishop and the [626] Bishop of Gozo to debate their policy in public at a Labour rally in Cospicua, the Bishops replied to this insult by issuing a circular which declared it a mortal sin to print, write for, sell, buy, distribute or read the Labour Party newspapers. All confessors were instructed to put the necessary questions to their penitents.

578 665 794 795 [851] [608] Hence, to remain a Labour supporter, a person has to forego the Church sacraments that he has been brought up to believe vital to his happiness and spiritual salvation. This is a very serious choice for a practising Catholic, and before these sanctions were imposed, the Maltese were among the most devoutly Catholic people in the world. It has also meant that MLP supporters cannot

[1] This refers to the Archbishop's charge, made at a rally in March 1961, that Mintoff had received $61,000 from the allegedly Communist dominated Afro-Asian Peoples' Solidarity Organization, which the MLP had just joined.

[539] [2] A Maltese proverb meaning that corruption first becomes apparent among people in high places. This was presumably directed against the Archbishop.

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

act as godparents. For this reason a number of people, prevented from inviting relatives and friends to fill this office, have preferred not to baptize their children.

Many have bowed to the authority of the Church and have stopped supporting the Labour Party. But in spite of everything that has been preached on the subject, many others still feel that there is nothing incompatible between support of their political leader and loyalty to their religion. This view is expressed in the slogan which is displayed so often at MLP rallies that it has become almost a party motto: 'With Mintoff always, against the Church never.' Although they are told from the pulpit that it does them no good, most members of the Labour Party continue to attend the daily or weekly services of worship that they have been going to since childhood. Besides, many have rationalized their action by saying that the Archbishop of Malta is acting for personal and political motives; as long as the Pope himself does not condemn the MLP they will continue to support it. This attitude is reinforced by the experience of some Labour supporters who have been absolved while on holiday or on duty with the military services in countries where it is possible to be a Socialist and a practising Catholic at the same time.

As a result of these sanctions many have turned their backs on the Church and no longer attend religious services. Before this struggle between the MLP and the Church, it would have been unthinkable for anyone in a small village to stay away from church. A civil servant in one village told me that he had been a confirmed atheist for years. Yet until this past year he had gone to church every Sunday. In his words, 'People make it very difficult for someone who does not go to church, and I have to live here all my life. Besides, I might lose my job if people complained about me.' But he is now an open supporter of the Labour Party and no longer feels obliged to go to church. To some extent, then, the sanctions of the Church have created a social role for the non-practising Catholic.

The attitude of many who support the Labour Party is summed up in the words of a twenty-year-old bus conductor in Kortin. We were sitting around a table in a small wine shop when I asked him why he supported the MLP in spite of the opposition of the Church to it and the fact that Mintoff was regarded as a Communist by so many in the village. He replied in English, 'I am

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

MLP cost them their jobs.[1] Others have friends or relatives on the other side with whom they do not wish to break. Yet others, responsible for maintaining the unity of a neutral club, fear that an open stand will bring about a crisis which would divide it. Although most of these persons continue to read the condemned papers, they do so discreetly, for reading them openly would provoke incidents. There are also a large number of Labour sympathizers who have been unwilling to forego the sacraments of the Church. They no longer read the Labour papers or attend MLP rallies, but they are bitter about having been forced to make the choice.

The physical act of purchasing a Labour newspaper has in itself become a public statement of political allegiance. After the condemnation and the threat of a general Church boycott of their premises (which was carried out in Gozo) most vendors have refused to handle MLP publications. In the villages they can usually only be bought at the local MLP club. Thus the act of striding across the village square and into the stronghold of the devil, performed in front of many of the village elders, becomes an open declaration of sympathy with the Labour cause. In Kortin many wait until the square is empty, usually around midnight in the summer, and then scuttle into the club to get their papers.

III

There is a correlation between occupational class and support for one of these two ideological divisions. In general, professionals, white-collar workers and farmers support the Archbishop, and industrial labourers the Labour Party. There are several reasons for this. To begin with, the Labour Party is a working-man's party, and there is ideological support for it on that account. Although the MLP has a definitely socialist ideology, and is a member of the Socialist International (points on which the Church attacks it regularly), it advocates few of the measures associated with doctrinaire Socialism, such as public ownership of transport and industry or the collectivization of farming. On the other hand, it does promise equal opportunity for all, and 'the right of the

[1] The Malta Government Circular of 19 October 1960 prohibited most grades of civil servants from holding office in political organizations or publicly expressing their political views. This regulation is something of a paradox in a small country in which most intellectuals work for the government in one capacity or another.

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

463 467 465 Grand Harbour and first establish themselves in the conurbation surrounding it has helped to keep the farmer devoutly tied to the Church. For this reason the action of the MLP in challenging the authority of the Bishops is as abhorrent to him as it is difficult to understand.

463 578 665 795 [626] The recent sanctions of the Church have increased the class alignment of those who support the Labour Party and those who oppose it. This is largely because those with high social status have more to lose than industrial workers, and are thus more vulnerable to the pressure of public opinion and the Church. The increasingly heavy pressure of the Church has forced many of the young professionals and intellectuals to abandon the party for which they voted in 1955. But even when the MLP was in office, its policies began to alarm many in the professional and middle classes. They objected not only to Mintoff's attitude to the Church, but also to the somewhat abrupt way his government occasionally dealt with the professional and business communities. Many were disturbed by the MLP's rather sudden switch from advocating integration with Britain to demanding complete independence. As most of those who left the party or became inactive in it were moderates, both in their approach to the Church and to the economic and political problems facing Malta, the MLP has become more extreme in its outlook. This in turn induced others to leave it. This process was accelerated by the [656] regulations which prohibited the better-educated civil servants from taking an active part in the political life of their country.

463 665 666 Table 7 below shows the rough correlation between occupational class and support of the Malta Labour Party. In particular, it demonstrates that as the proportion of skilled workers decreases, so does the proportion of voters who support Labour. Other variables are the number of professionals and farmers. The Second and Fourth Electoral Districts polled the highest number of Labour votes in the 1962 election, and the Sixth and Tenth the lowest. The MLP polled 56 per cent of the total votes in the Second Electoral District, where 45 per cent of the working population are classified as skilled labourers.

In contrast, it received only 6 per cent of the votes in Gozo, where only 16 per cent of the people are skilled labourers, but 38 per cent are engaged in agriculture. Another important variable is the number of clergy resident in a district. The relatively high

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

festa partit form the nucleus of his political following. It is not surprising therefore that he should support the party they favour.

There is another interesting way in which festa partiti in general, and secondary partiti in particular, are related to support for the Labour Party. In all villages divided by these partiti, people have become conditioned to opposing the authority of the Church in connection with matters dealing with the celebration of feasts. This, I suggest, has enabled them to accept the anti-clerical outlook of the Labour Party more easily than the people of villages not so divided. An old stone-cutter in Kortin, who was procurator of one of the small chapels in the village, once unconsciously pointed to the structural similarity of the MLP and secondary festa partiti. We were discussing the resemblance of the Strickland crisis of thirty years ago to the present political dispute, when he pointed to the parish church and remarked, 'I've always been against them. I was for Strickland. I'm for Mintoff, and if we had partiti here, I would support the secondary feast.' There is, of course, a difference between the opposition of a secondary partit and that of the MLP. Nonetheless, both oppose the authority of the Church and both resort to attacks on the clergy to drive home their points of view. This is anti-clericalism. Both the festa partiti and the Labour Party make a distinction between the person and the office of the cleric they attack, and they appear to attack the former rather than the latter. But repeated attacks upon the person holding an office may weaken the office itself. Thus prolonged anti-clericalism can lead to anti-religious sentiment, or at least prepare the way for it. This, I feel, has happened in the case of the festa partiti.

In challenging the decisions of the Church relating to matters of festa policy a festa partisan often resorts to violence. He frightens the priest with home-made bombs to show his displeasure, to try and change the decision and even to compel him to leave the village. But he never attacks the ultimate right of the Church or its ministers to make those decisions. Indeed, some friends in Farrug were quite shocked when I suggested that they were doing just this. On the other hand, this constant rebellion against the authority of the Church has accustomed people to being at odds for long periods with their parish priests as well as with the Archbishop. During these times, they often ignore what the Church has to say if it does not agree with the point of view they

2; Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

hold. This is the accepted pattern of behaviour, not only in villages divided by festa partiti, but also in others which have disputes with the Church. But it is only in the villages with festa partiti that these disputes, and the related anti-clerical action, take place on a regularly recurring basis. In these villages, though people are devout in observing many details of their religion, constant opposition to the parish priest in matters connected with festas has led them to look upon a measure of anti-clericalism as part of their way of life.

The relative lack of respect for the clergy in these villages has been partly responsible for a rather high turnover of parish priests. It has been shown how uncomfortable festa partiti can make the life of a parish priest. This, plus the meagre living in the smaller parishes, prompts priests to look for openings in wealthier and less troublesome villages. The Church itself regards the small rural parishes as training or 'stepping-stone parishes', as a monsignor from the Curia once described them to me. But even as such, they are unpopular, and the Archbishop often has difficulty finding priests willing to take charge of them. Farrug, for example, has had six parish priests since 1953. The lack of continuity of Church leadership in these small, divided villages has tended to weaken its influence there and to foster a lack of respect for its authority.

In this social climate the anti-clericalism of the Labour Party fits without great difficulty. Labour supporters have already had experience as festa partisans in ignoring the commands of the Church, and in enduring the taunts and disapproval of their rivals in the other partit. For them anti-clericalism is nothing new, and they are thus not as vulnerable to public opinion and the sanctions of the Church as persons in villages which do not have this tradition of opposition to the Church.

But if there is a certain similarity between the anti-clerical behaviour of many festa enthusiasts and that of MLP supporters, most persons make a distinction between the two. The anti-clerical actions of the festa partiti are usually directed against particular clerics in connection with specific decisions. In contrast, the anti-clericalism of the Labour Party is directed at the Archbishop in particular and often at all priests in general. This difference stems from the fact that basically their challenge to the authority of the Church differs significantly. Where the festa partisan does

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

578 621 665 666

same political party. Thus a politician who is also a leading member of a festa partit always asks a rival candidate from his party to come to his village and canvass the party votes from the opposite festa partit.

621 66

Most people believe that politicians trade promises to assist festa partiti in return for votes. One well-known Labour politician who is the leader of the secondary festa partit in his own village, made such a promise to gain the support of a neighbouring secondary partit that was facing eviction. In return for the votes of the partit, he offered to introduce a bill into the Legislative Assembly which would prevent landlords from evicting band clubs. The proposition appealed to the partit and the bill, which [671] gained a great deal of support for the Labour Party from other clubs as well, became law.[1] In fact, it was one of the first laws the MLP enacted after it was returned to office in 1955. Partly as a result of his promise of assistance, but also because of his keen interest in the problems of secondary festa partiti, this candidate became so identified with this neighbouring partit that he had to ask MLP candidates from the other side of the electoral district to bid for the Labour votes of the members of the opposite partit. He naturally asked them to canvass the Labour votes of the titular partit in his own village as well.

But perhaps the most famous case of this kind, and certainly the most conspicuous, took place in Gozo. For many years the supporters of the Leone partit in Rabat had been embarrassed by the fact that the statue of their beloved patron could not be taken in processions from the cathedral. There was simply no way for her to pass through the walls of the old citadel in which the cathedral was situated. The members of the partit wished to remedy this by breaching the wall and making a large gate, but the Antiquities Board strongly opposed the idea. Finally, an ambitious MLP candidate came to their rescue. He is alleged to have promised them help if they voted for him. Whether the deal for votes is true I do not know. I do know, however, that the politician was elected and succeeded in having a huge new gate torn in the historic citadel. That he did this at public expense, against the orders of his [626] Ministers and in defiance of the Antiquities Board, is evidence of his ingenuity and single-mindedness. Of course, it might also have

[1] Act V, 1955: 'An Act to Amend the Reletting of Urban Property (Regulation) Ordinance.'

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

621
626
66

been due to the amount of pressure that the partit brought to bear on him.

V

666

But popularity, close contact with the electorate and the support of his party and festa partit are not always enough to assure the success of a candidate. In order to understand why this is so, it is necessary to examine the electoral process. The system of voting which has been used in Malta since 1921 is proportional representation with the single transferable vote. The country is divided into ten electoral districts, each of which returns five representatives to the Legislative Assembly. The districts are based on population density, and each averages about 15,000 registered voters. A candidate need not be resident in a district in order to stand for election there, and he can stand in two districts at the same time. If he is successful in both, he relinquishes one seat, which is then filled by a member of his party chosen in a by-election. At the polling booth each voter is given a ballot paper listing all the candidates standing in the district, and is required to rank them by placing a number against the name of each, to indicate the order of preference. After the polling is finished, all the ballot boxes from a district are opened simultaneously and the ballot papers mixed. The votes are then counted. As each paper is opened, a single vote is credited to the candidate to whom the voter has given first preference. This is the first count. A candidate is declared elected if he receives a certain proportion of the total number of votes cast.[1] After the first count the candidate with the lowest number of votes is eliminated, and his votes are redistributed in accordance with the second preferences. The votes are then retotalled for the second count. The candidate with the lowest number of votes is again eliminated, and his votes are redistributed for the third count. The elimination of candidates and the redistribution of their votes continues until five candidates receive the required quota of votes.

Few candidates are elected on the first count, for the first preferences of the voters are generally distributed among a large number. First preferences reflect the popularity of a candidate and the size of his following, but the secondary votes he receives are

[1] This quota, the Droop quota, is one plus the total number of votes cast, divided by the number of seats (5) plus one.

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

disappeared when the old Constitutional Party died out in the long period of Governor's rule and the war that followed. At present, however, the MLP shows no signs of weakening. On the contrary, it is as tightly united and strong today as it has ever been. Thus this conflict will in all probability continue to divide Malta and Gozo in the foreseeable future, though its intensity may fluctuate.

It is well to remember that this study was carried out at a time when the hostility between these two camps was at its peak. Some of the examples that have been given, therefore, are extreme cases which would have been quite inconceivable even ten years ago. It is also possible that ten years hence they will appear equally strange. But this does not detract from the relevance of the analysis, for if the examples given are ephemeral, the principles which they illustrate are permanent.

III

In many respects the rebellion of a political party against the authority of the Bishop is similar to that of a festa partit against its parish priest. There is an important difference, however; the festa partit can appeal an unfavourable decision of its parish priest to the Archbishop. If the latter rules against the partit, it can bring pressure to bear that may result in the transfer of the parish priest. A political party, on the other hand, cannot appeal the unfavourable decisions of the Bishop to any local authority, for in his diocese his word is law. Though in theory such disputes can be referred to the Holy See, in practice, as in the case of Strickland's conflict with the Church, they fester for so long that by the time Rome is brought in reconciliation is difficult, if not impossible. If in practice a political party cannot appeal to a higher authority, it can even less agitate for the replacement of the Bishop. Thus disputes remain unresolved and the supporters of the political party become progressively more anti-clerical. Finally, their anti-clericalism is equated with anti-Catholicism, and their rebellion against authority with revolt against the social order.

But is it in fact a revolution? It is important to draw a clear distinction between rebellion and revolution.[1] In the case of the former, people may turn against a leader personally, and may

[1] *Cf.* Max Gluckman, *Custom and Conflict in Africa* (Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1939), p. 28.

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

there have been remarkably few of the overtly hostile attacks, common when festa partiti are registering disagreement. What accounts for the qualitative difference in the violence between the groups involved in these two types of conflict? What prevents the national political conflict from degenerating into widespread violence, from destroying normal relations, thus making shambles of the social order? Is it merely the presence of a large, efficient police force?

In point of fact, there are many institutions and ties that operate to exert pressure on the opponents to reach a settlement, and so prevent the dispute from destroying the social system. The most important of the factors that inhibit the spread of conflict is the existence of persons whose loyalties are divided between the conflicting sides. Such persons have a vested interest in the maintenance of peace and limitation of the area of conflict.[1]

The considerable difference between the disputes of festa partiti with the Church, and the conflict between the Church and the Labour Party, has been stressed. The disputes involving festa partiti are localized, their course is highly formalized, there are acknowledged peace-makers: they are clearly rebellions in the sense that Gluckman uses. These disputes are also tightly circumscribed by customary safeguards which keep them from spreading and channel them through set stages until they have been resolved. It is patterned action which, in spite of its occasional violence, does not threaten the position of the Church. In contrast, the conflict between the MLP and the Church is not localized, it is not circumscribed by a body of custom which keeps it from spreading, and there are no acknowledged peace-makers who can mediate between the disputants. Not only is it inherent, it is irresoluble. There is an air of revolt about it and if it were allowed to run to the violence of some of the clashes between festa partiti and the Church, it could throw the country into civil war. The violence of the festa partiti does not threaten the social order, that between supporters of the Church and the MLP would.

What keeps the conflict from becoming more violent are the thousands of persons who have their allegiances divided between the Church and the Labour Party. All these people work to keep the conflict from spreading, if not actually to make peace. Who are they? They are the countless persons whose families have been

[1] *Ibid., passim.*

2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

divided by the conflict, the office-holders who have laid politics aside to preserve the unity of the clubs for which they are responsible, the many who have sought to avoid open commitments to either side, and to remain in contact with both. They are the people who, in spite of all that has been preached and said against them by both sides, still look to both the Archbishop and Mintoff as their leaders, the one in the religious sphere, the other in the political. They see nothing inconsistent in hanging pictures of the two side by side in their houses. All have a vested interest in peace; and all work in their own way to keep the conflict from spreading and destroying completely their customary way of life.

At one time the entire civil service worked to prevent the spread of conflict in much the same way. When the Labour Party took over the government many civil servants, forced by the nature of their office to carry out the orders of the party in power, were obliged to administer policies which were contrary to the declared interests of the Church. Their loyalties were thus often divided between the two. Some of the higher civil servants carried messages between the two sides. Others called at the Curia merely to assure the Church that they implemented unwillingly the controversial policies. Yet others acted quietly in their own various ways to reduce the tension between government and Church that made their own positions so uncomfortable. Civil servants at all levels thus worked to keep the Church and the Labour Government in touch with each other and exerted considerable pressure to prevent the relations between the two from deteriorating even more. But their conciliatory influence came to an end when the Labour Party resigned. It is not surprising, therefore, that with the removal of this bridge between the MLP and the Church, the conflict became more intense almost immediately.

The two sides are now linked together only by the many persons with conflicting allegiances. Yet their ability to keep the conflict from spreading is slowly being reduced by the uncompromising position of the Church which is forcing them to take sides openly. As these persons reluctantly do so, the important cross links that tie the two combatants together are snapped off one by one, and the conflict becomes progressively more intense.

• 2: Boissevain E-5 (1960-1961) 1965
EZ6 Malta EZ6

V

578 665 795 What of the future? It would seem likely that the present conflict will continue. The dispute between the Church and the Labour Party has become institutionalized in many villages through their respective associations and social clubs. The major political activity at the village level will thus most likely continue to be a reflection of that at the national level. It will be a dispute between those who wish to preserve the identity of the village as a parish, with the dependence upon the Church that it implies, and the secular elements who wish to establish the village as a political unit apart from the Church. But there will also be other conflicting groups, such as the festa partiti, which will continue to manipulate this political division to their own advantage. The leader of one of the secondary festa partiti indicated to me how this may take place. He was discussing the recent attempts of the Association of Secondary Feasts to increase the scale of its members' feasts, and concluded by remarking, 'If the Archbishop doesn't increase our feast this year, ninety per cent of the club will vote for Mintoff in the coming election.' Thus in the future, as in the past, the Church will continue to be one of the central actors in the drama of Maltese village politics.

578 621 665 795 [626]

*159 As village-weighman he has a high social standing in the
879 district. His literacy, spacious house, and herd of cows
178 further enhance his status. He maintains that within the
[554] village the place of the Parish priest is as over it was
[793] "in spite of the new learning". He notes that the increas-
[626] ing number of dissenting voices in the village are kept
firmly in their place by the pressure of public opinion but
[197] that political rivalry, a comparatively recent feature in
the village, is growing. The returning emigrant brings new
ideas - including some on religion - but the strength of
[794] the Church remains much less questioned than is the case in
the towns. Censu shares the still general view that money
[651] given to the Church is "payment towards the good of the
community". Money paid to the Government in the form of
taxes would, on the other hand, be regarded as an imposition
bringing no benefit to the individual, and therefore to be
avoided.

CASE XII : Summary.

*159 (A cows' milk producer and village weighman.)

423 A. Land.
427 33 Tmien in Mqabba-Kirkop Plain:
4 Field plots in 3 parcels, on Terra Rossa Soils and Xero-Rendzinas.
All leased from 2 landlords: Total rent £34 per annum.

*159 B. Utilisation.
241 Over 5 Tmien wasteland.
Main concentration on fodder, which accounted for 74% crop area in 1957/58, as against only 33% in 1956/57 winter season.
2 tmien under barley - pulled green.
3 tmien under sulla.
6½ tmien under vetches.
5 tmien under wheat.
c.10 tmien under potatoes.
Remainder under vegetables, prickly pear and fallow.
Main cash crops potatoes and onions.

*159 C. Livestock.
231 Late 1957 - 13 head of cattle (10 milch cows, 2 calves,
234 1 service bull). All Maltese Friesian. 10 goats;
1 ewe; 2 horses; 50 poultry; rabbits.
This herd was built up from 6 goats, 4 sheep and 1 cow in 1938.

*159 D. Capital.
[423] - No freehold land. Owns large village house.
[454] - No statement as to capital reserves but general evi-
[407] dence suggests a sum of the order of £1500.
- Equipment - no machinery, but normal range of local tools.

*159 E. Labour.
464 - Family labour - one 30 year old son.
- In 1956 male hired labour amounted to 60 days, and
[465] female to 90 days.
Cost - men c.£1 a day, women c.14/- a day.
Hand labour almost entirely for sowing during autumn and winter and harvesting in early summer.
[427] - Hires heavy tractor plow, rotary cultivator and
241 threshing machine each year. Costs of contract
[407] plowing 13/- to £1 a tmien.

land but maintains that it is becoming uneconomic because of high labour costs and difficulty of raising yields any further.

(iii) Makes careful practical distinctions between types of land:
- some fields have 8 inches of soil on rock platform and these can only be worked by hand.
- deeper soils up to 3 feet thick need periodic deep plowing although this may result in the bringing to the surface of "newba" (or "melà" - salt) - sub-surface saline concentration with harmful results.
- red and white soils have different characteristics for tillage and crop-growth.
- notes the presence of a thin, very hard weathered layer on top of Globigerina bed rock. This "skorża tal-blat" is believed to prevent the movement of moisture from the rock water-table to overlying soil.

(iv) In spite of literacy, general initiative and acumen he is conservative about trying new ideas. Here, as elsewhere, the chief obstacle appears to be social rather than economic - the fear of being different and the fear of failure in the eyes of the rest of the community.

(v) In spite of (possibly because of) experience in check-weighing, is no more prepared to trust M.M.U. and official marketing agencies than any other farmer.

CASE XIII : Toni (A part-time arable farmer and caretaker of a military camp.)

An example of part-time farming in which the field operations are the subsidiary part of the business - from the financial point of view though not as regards the amount of time spent on them.

His caretaking duties bring him some £5 per week for most of the year and yet leave him with enough free time to cultivate several irrigable patches near the camp. Now aged nearly seventy he works a much smaller total area than the thirty tmien of his younger days. He could in fact live on his income from his caretaking and continues to work the fields for four reasons:

(a) To provide food for his present family of three,
(b) To produce a supplementary income from the sale of cash crops,
(c) To occupy his time with the farming which he knows - as something of a hobby,
(d) To provide his emigrated sons each "with a piece of land" when they return to Malta for their retirement.

Items (b) and (c) reflect his independence of farming for the maintenance of himself and his wife and daughter, while (c) and (d) suggest that although farming ceases to be the countryman's livlihood he inclines to retain a residual interest in it even when he has been away from Malta for the greater part of his working life. This is a characteristic feature of rural Malta and an important aspect of the recent increase in part-time farming. The 1957 Census of Agriculture lists 9,588 part-time as against 7,813 full-time farmers (B/164, p.20). The trend towards part- in place of full-time farming is significant in the present overall retreat from agriculture. It represents in many cases a

*159 make money, but he has little sympathy for the older people
156 around him and they in their turn regard him as a social (as
461 well as economic) rebel. He takes little part in the social
● 626 life of the village. Work is his first concern and he is
517 most annoyed when the priest, with whom he has "not been on
493 speaking terms" since his return from Australia, forbids his working on Sundays. This includes even repair work on the machinery indoors. He knows well enough that were he to plow on Sundays or feasts days he would be "publically ostracised and no villager would hire him and his plow". His relaxation is his motor-cycle on which he escapes at high speed from time to time along with others of his generation who "have eyes for the lights of Valletta rather than farming".

*159 Towards his own parents Ġanni's attitude is typical.
156 He regards his father as belonging to the old generation of
593 illiterate or semi-literate countryfolk, steeped in the conservatism of the past and the traditional. Father and son argue continuously over points of policy - with Ġanni tending to assume that his education and wider experience entitles him to something of a 'casting vote' in such arguments. Nevertheless the family tie is there and is strong enough for Ġanni to have an innate respect for his father despite the gulf in education and ideas. Thus Ġanni supported his father's scheme to plant some cotton even though he himself doubted the profitability of this move (1958).

*159 Marriage in Malta, where the "evil dowry" ('data')
156 system is maintained, holds little attraction for Ġanni.
[583] He observes that he cannot take a girl out on his motor-cycle without the older people of the village criticising him for not marrying her first. This and the whole social climate of village life in Malta of which it is part clashes with the ways he learned in Australia and with the ideas and beliefs which his education and his knowledge of the world outside the village of his birth have brought him.

Ġanni is primarily important to the village because he is staying there. He takes little part in village affairs, he does not "bother about festas", and he has few close
[178] friends in his age group of farmers. But his ideas and the new methods and implements which he has brought to the village in face of considerable opposition and ridicule are a significant item in the changing scene of Maltese farming.

CASE XV

*159 Three brothers work together as a team. Their father
402 works the land full-time and the brothers join him when their
407 joint tractor-hire business is not claiming their attention. Their mechanical activities began some twenty-two years ago and now extend over more than a sixth of the area of Malta.
000 They appear to have been among the first in the tractor